



LOWELL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
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Sokhary Chau
Mayor and Chairperson

Jackie Doherty
Vice-Chairperson

Susie Chhoun
Eileen Delrossi
Dominik Lay
Connie A. Martin
Stacey Thompson

Policy & Governance
Subcommittee Meeting

Monday, September 18, 2023
City Hall – Mayor’s Reception Room
6:00 p.m.

Tel: (978) 674-4324
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Subcommittee Members Present:	Chairperson Doherty, Ms. Chhoun and Ms. Delrossi
School Department Personnel Present:	Ms. Phillips, Chief Engagement & Equity Officer Ms. Desmond, Chief Academic Officer Mr. Fiato, Head of School, Lowell High School

Chairperson Doherty called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m. and all Subcommittee members were present. The following agenda items were discussed:

- 1. LHS Graduation Policy**
- 2. Cell Phone Policy**

Ms. Delrossi made a motion to take the agenda out of order; seconded by Ms. Doherty. 3 yeas APPROVED

Mr. Fiato stated that Lowell High School is proposing a change in the current cell phone policy to increase student engagement and reduce distractions. He stated that during the second part of the school year a team of staff members (thirty-seven (37) members in total) collaborated on drafting a policy recommendation for consideration and review, and their goal was to create a distraction-free learning environment. He stated that the team wanted to ensure that every student has the opportunity to focus on their studies without any interruptions from their phones, and that they believe that this policy will not only help students stay on task, but it will also promote a more positive and productive classroom experience. He stated that they also believe that this policy will help to reduce the incidence of cyberbullying and other negative online behaviors, and by limiting access to cell phones during class, they hope to create a safer and more inclusive learning environment for all students. He stated that they recognize that cell

phones can be a source of anxiety and stress for some students and they hope that by providing a designated location for phones during class, students will feel less pressure to constantly check their devices and will be able to fully engage in classroom activities.

Mr. Jessaume and Mr. Keefe, both teachers at Lowell High School and members of the team that worked on this proposed policy, spoke to the subcommittee about the increased psychological safety and school wide sense of belonging as well as supporting teachers & students through consistency and structure.

Ms. Delrossi stated that she agrees that it is a distraction, but she has some concerns. She asked how many of the teachers are putting a focus on this.

Mr. Jessaume responded that 100% of the teachers are aware of this and 70% wanted this brought forward. He stated that he is already doing this in his classroom.

Ms. Delrossi stated that she is concerned for the teachers who have students who don't want to participate and then the disruption in the classroom because of this.

Ms. Doherty asked how this is different than before.

The team responded that if a student is found in violation of the policy they have consequences outlined.

Ms. Delrossi asked if parents are being asked to sign waivers.

The team stated no.

Ms. Chhoun stated that she likes the idea of consistency.

A security guard that sits on the team stated that the lock box is clear, transparent and has twenty-five (25) slots for the phones.

Ms. Doherty stated that she thinks the compliance piece is great if everyone is on the same page. She stated that if approved it would need to be reassessed at the end of the year and that it needs to be consistent.

Ms. Delrossi made a motion to bring the cell phone policy to the full body for further discussion and approval if the Committee so desires; seconded by Chairperson Doherty. 3 years APPROVED

Ms. Chhoun left the meeting at 6:52 p.m.

Ms. Desmond then spoke about the LHS Graduation Policy. She stated that currently to obtain a diploma of graduation from Lowell High School, each student in the class of 2024 and 2025 must satisfy the following minimum requirements:

- At least four (4) years' attendance at the high school level.
- Fulfill the standard requirement of earning at least ninety (90) credits, of which at least twenty (20) credits must be earned in the senior year.

- Pass the MCAS exams in ELA, Mathematics, and Science or meet Competency Determination Red highlighted areas should be removed and the below text added: The standard curriculum of high school is four (4) years. Students who face substantial barriers to attending the fourth full year but have met all other requirements may work with house office staff to discuss an alternative pathway to a diploma at LHS.

Ms. Desmond stated that the proposed change is to strike the four-year and 20-credit requirements from the Lowell High School graduation policy. She stated doing this will improve equity in graduation opportunities for students facing barriers to finish their full senior year. She stated that students are currently allowed to appeal for a waiver of the four-year, twenty-credit requirement, but “must submit a letter of appeal, with the recommendation of their Assistant Principal, to the Head of School for final approval.” The waiver process may be inequitable and limit access for students who would benefit from it. She stated that students who face barriers (mental health, housing, economic) are less likely to be aware of the opportunity and/or advocate for themselves to receive a waiver. She stated that in school year 2021-2022, Lowell Public Schools saw the highest dropout rate (5.5%) and chronic absenteeism (38.5%) in history. She stated that students are facing barriers such as:

- Mental health: anxiety, depression, PTSD, school refusal, peer conflict.
- Economic need: working full time to support themselves and family.
- Family Circumstance: pregnant or parenting, taking care of other family. In SY21-22, forty-one (41) students dropped out who had senior credit standing.

Ms. Desmond also gave an example of a student who faced such barriers with the unfortunate outcome of the student dropping out. She stated that the state of Massachusetts allows this and the State Graduation Requirements are as follows:

- In Massachusetts, public school students must meet both local and state requirements in order to earn a high school diploma.
- Students must earn a passing score on the grade 10 MCAS tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, and one of the high school Science and Technology/Engineering (STE)* tests to meet their CD requirement.
- Massachusetts state law requires the instruction of American history and civics (G.L. c. 71, § 2) and physical education (G.L. c. 71, § 3).

Ms. Desmond stated that other local area high schools do not have a four (4) year requirement listed in their local policy. Ms. Desmond stated that they believe that Lowell Public Schools will see an increase in the district's overall graduation rate, a reduction in the dropout rate, a reduction of staff time spent on waiver process, and inconsistency in implementation, and it prioritizes competency over seat-time.

Ms. Delrossi asked if this would only be for a finite amount of students.

Ms. Desmond stated that it should be done for a year and then the results should be analyzed. This change isn't advocating for losing students, but to be able to be flexible for some students and at the same time being able to meet the state requirements.

Ms. Doherty stated that she believes this should be done on a case to case basis, but she worries about attendance and doesn't want to end up having a max exodus.

Mr. Fiato stated that his guidance counselors know their students very well. He stated that if a student is looking into doing this they need to work with the guidance counselor.

Ms. Doherty stated that she believes this policy should be recommended, but only on a case to case basis and stated that she also believes we should review this in a year.

Ms. Delrossi stated that she likes that it will be measured and tracked.

Chairperson Doherty made a motion to recommend adopting these changes and bringing this to the full Committee for approval; seconded by Ms. Delrossi. 2 yeas, 1 absent (Ms. Chhoun) APPROVED

Ms. Delrossi made a motion to adjourn at 7:17 p.m.; seconded by Chairperson Doherty. 2 yeas, 1 absent (Ms. Chhoun) APPROVED

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Desmond', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ms. Desmond, Chief Academic Officer
for Interim Superintendent Skinner,
Secretary for the Lowell School
Committee

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